

Message Text

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C O N F I D E N T I A L RANGOON 2214

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PINT BM

SUBJ: LAW AND ORDER CAMPAIGN UNDER WAY

1. SUMMARY. THERE IS MOUNTING EVIDENCE THAT GUB IN MIDST OF ONE OF ITS PERIODIC LAW AND ORDER CAMPAIGNS AGAINST POLITICAL AND ECONOMIC DISSIDENTS AND OTHER "UNRULY ELEMENTS", IN WAKE OF LAST JUNE'S DISTURBANCES. CAMPAIGN MAY REFLECT DECISION TO PURSUE MILITARY RATHER THAN PARTY APPROACH TO PROBLEM OF CIVIL INDISCIPLINE. CAMPAIGN IS ANOTHER INDICATION OF GUB'S INABILITIES TO COUNTER UNDERLYING ECONOMIC ILLS THROUGH MEANS OTHER THAN FORCE. END SUMMARY.

2. SINCE THE JUNE 1975 STUDENT/LABOR DISTURBANCES, THERE IS GROWING EVIDENCE THAT THE NE WIN REGIME IS WAGING ONE OF ITS PERIODIC "LAW AND ORDER" CAMPAIGNS TO BRING POLITICAL, ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL DISSIDENTS IN LINE. ONE OF THE FIRST SIGNALS OF THIS TOUGHER STRATEGY WAS THE ANNOUNCEMENT IN LATE JUNE BY THE COUNCIL OF PEOPLE'S JUSTICE THAT HIGHER COURTS WOULD REVIEW LOWER COURT SENTENCES TO ASSURE THAT THESE WERE STRICT ENOUGH TO ACT AS A DETERRENT TO OTHER WRONG DOERS AND WERE EMPOWERED TO UP THE SENTENCES IF NEED BE. THIS WAS FOLLOWED BY THE ANNOUNCEMENT OF FAIRLY HARSH PRISON SENTENCES FOR STUDENTS (UP TO 8 YEARS) AND EVEN HEAVIER ONES AGAINST WORKERS (UP TO 16 YEARS) WHO PARTICIPATED IN THE JUNE DISORDERS.

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2. THE CRACKDOWN WAS NOT LIMITED TO THE STUDENTS AND OTHERS ALONE. IN EARLY JULY THE GUB ANNOUNCED THAT 1200 "BAD CHARACTERS" HAD BEEN ROUNDED UP IN RANGOON, CONSISTING LARGELY OF PICKPOCKETS, TICKET SCALPERS AND SIMILAR ELEMENTS WHOSE MEANS OF LIVELIHOOD DID NOT SIT WELL WITH THE SOCIALIST LEADERSHIP. IN ADDITION, 481 EMPLOYEES, MAINLY LOWER LEVEL, OF VARIOUS DIVISIONS OF THE AGRICULTURE MINISTRY WERE SUDDENLY HAULED UP ON CHARGES OF NEGLECT, INDISCIPLINE AND MISAPPROPRIATION OF FUNDS; NO SENTENCES FOR THEM HAVE YET BEEN ANNOUNCED. IT IS GENERALLY BELIEVED THAT SIMILAR CRACKDOWNS IN OTHER MINISTRIES AND TRADE CORPORATIONS MAY BE IN THE OFFING.

3. THE PROGRAM AGAINST INDISCIPLINED ELEMENTS CONTINUES AT THIS WRITING. ALLEGED ILLICIT GOODS WERE RECENTLY SEIZED FROM A RANGOON WAREHOUSE (RICE MILL PARTS, CONSTRUCTION MATERIALS), ALMOST 100 SMALL PRIVATE INDUSTRIES IN RANGOON HAVE BEEN CLOSED FOR RESELLING RAW MATERIALS PURCHASED FROM THE GOVERNMENT, AND "WHARF THEIVES" AND PORT AREA SQUATTERS HAVE BEEN JAILED. THE ARMY, RATHER THAN THE POLICE, IS CURRENTLY MAKING HOUSE TO HOUSE SEARCHES OF RESIDENCES IN THE LOWER CLASS SUBURBAN AREAS SUCH AS NORTH OKKALAPA, IDENTIFYING RESIDENTS AND QUESTIONING SUSPICIOUS VISITORS. AS AFTER THE U THANT AFFAIR, ARMY PATROLS ARE AGAIN STOPPING LONG HAIREED YOUTH ON THE STREETS AND PROVIDING THEM HAIRCUTS GRATIS. UNDERSTANDABLY, THE CRACKDOWN HAS CREATED UNEASINESS AMONG THE RANGOON POPULACE; THERE IS NOT YET MUCH EVIDENCE THAT IT IS BEING APPLIED TO THE REST OF BURMA, WHERE THE MILITARY DOES NOT EXERCISE DIRECT JURISDICTION AS IT DOES IN THE CAPITAL.

4. THE CRACKDOWN COULD PERHAPS REFLECT THE RESOLUTION OF A DIFFERENCE IN STRATEGY BETWEEN THE ARMY AND THE BSPP. THE BSPP, AFTER ALL, PRIOR TO THE JUNE DISTURBANCES, URGED THAT THE LABOR AND STUDENT PROBLEM BE TREATED IN A MORE POLITICAL FASHION, E.G., SENDING OUT COUNCIL OF STATE MEMBERS AND SENIOR PARTY OFFICERS TO TALK WITH THE WORKERS AND STUDENTS TO CONVINCE THEM TO MEND THEIR WAYS. THE ARMY PRESUMABLY TAKES A TOUGHER LINE, HANDLING CIVIL INDISCIPLINE MUCH AS IT WOULD INDISCIPLINE WITHIN ITS OWN RANKS. IN A MORE SPECULATIVE VEIN, THE CURRENT HARD LINE TACTICS COULD ALSO RELATE TO THE LONG STANDING FRICTION BETWEEN BSPP SECRETARY GENERAL , GENERAL SAN YU AND DEFENSE MINISTER GENERAL TIN OO. A BIT OF EVIDENCE TO SUPPORT THIS THESIS MIGHT BE INDICATED IN SAN

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YU'S RECENT CALL TO BSPP MEMBERS TO REGISTER WITH ACTIVE PARTY UNITS AND STAND UP AND BE COUNTED; HE COULD BE TRYING TO SOLIDIFY HIS OWN POWER BASE IN THE FACE OF INCREASED ASSERTIVENESS ON THE PART OF THE MILITARY.

5. WHATEVER THE BYZANTINE REASONS FOR THE LAW AND ORDER CAMPAIGN (IF THEY DO EXIST), IT DOES REFLECT THE ESSENTIAL WEAKNESS OF THE REGIME, I.E., ITS INABILITY TO CONTROL CIVIL DISCONTENT OTHER THAN

WITH FORCE AND MORE IMPORTANTLY, THE PAUCITY OF IDEAS OR PROGRAMS
DESIGNED TO ALLEVIATE THE UNDERLYING ECONOMIC ILLS OF THE COUNTRY.
HOWARTH

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